



## Abolish the Intelligence-Industrial Complex

[Ronald Bailey](#)

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The Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency should be abolished. The two spy agencies cause more problems than they solve and have become menaces to our open society. The CIA was created in 1947 at the dawn of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the NSA was born in 1952 to consolidate code-breaking and electronic communications spying capabilities. Today, thanks to the revelations of whistleblower [Edward Snowden](#), we now know that the "black budget" requests from America's 16 different intelligence agencies amounted to [\\$52.6 billion in 2013](#). Of that sum, the CIA sought \$14.7 billion and the NSA wanted \$10.5 billion. Total intelligence spending since the 9/11 terror attacks amounts to more than \$500 billion.

In 1991, Senator Daniel P. Moynihan (D-N.Y.) introduced The End the Cold War Act that would have abolished the Central Intelligence Agency and transferred all of its functions to the Department of State. The Act declared that "the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency as a separate entity during the Cold War undermined the role of the Department of State as the primary agency of the United States Government formulating and conducting foreign policy and providing information to the President concerning the state of world affairs."

In 1995, Moynihan reintroduced the legislation as the Central Intelligence Agency Abolition Act. In remarks in the Congressional Record then, Moynihan cited a 1993 speech by spy thriller writer John Le Carre to the Boston Bar Association in which he stated, "It wasn't the spies who won the cold war. I don't believe that in the end the spies mattered very much at all." Le Carre declared that "their capsuled isolation and their remote theorizing actually prevented them from seeing" in the 1980s that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse. CIA analysts failed to grasp, according to Le Carre, that the Soviet Empire was falling apart "because running a huge closed repressive society in the 1980s had become—economically, socially and militarily, and technologically—impossible." Le Carre concluded, "It was a victory achieved by openness, not secrecy. By frankness, not intrigue." Moynihan added, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was therefore the very denial of secrecy."

Moynihan's proposal to abolish the CIA was chiefly motivated by the fact that the agency whose primary task had been to monitor and evaluate America's number one enemy, the Soviet Union

had utterly failed at its main task. "The defining failure of the CIA was their inability to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union," he declared. Since then the list of massive CIA failures and missteps has grown much longer and the case for abolishing it and its sister agency, the NSA, has grown stronger.

CIA intelligence blunders begin practically from the birth of the agency. For example, the [CIA failed to recognize](#) that North Korea was about to invade South Korea in 1950 and, later, that the communist Chinese would commit hundreds of thousands of troops to aid North Korea. The agency led President John F. Kennedy to believe that the [Bay of Pigs invasion](#) of Cuba could overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime in 1961. Just before aerial photos showed Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962, CIA analysts [were still insisting](#) that the Soviets would not try to base them there. The agency also greatly underestimated the ability of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese to launch what became the Tet Offensive against South Vietnam in 1968. (See a wonderful ass-covering post-Tet national intelligence agency memo [here](#).)

Six months before the [Shah of Iran was overthrown](#) in 1979, the CIA notoriously issued an analysis that declared, "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation." The agency also failed to properly interpret the buildup of Soviet forces that preceded the [invasion of Afghanistan](#) on Christmas Eve in 1979. The year before Saddam Hussein [invaded Kuwait](#) in 1990, the CIA confidently predicted he wouldn't because his army was exhausted by the just concluded Iran-Iraq War. In 1998, the CIA did not foresee that [India would test nuclear weapons](#).

And, of course, the CIA and the NSA [utterly screwed up](#) their intelligence work leading up to the 9/11 terrorists attacks. And the irony of that stupendous failure is that both agencies were not punished, but were instead richly rewarded with more money and more power. In fact, it appears that CIA analyst [Alfreda Bikowsky](#) actually blocked CIA cooperation with law enforcement that might have stopped the 9/11 atrocities. Bikowsky was promoted and became an apparently enthusiastic participant in the CIA's torture program about which she later lied to Congress.

And the beat goes on. Even months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 failed to turn up [caches of weapons of mass destruction](#) that the CIA declared that Saddam Hussein possessed, the agency was still defending its flawed analysis.

More recently, intelligence analysts missed the signs of instability that resulted in the 2011 [Arab Spring uprisings](#) against authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain. U.S. intelligence agencies also failed to foresee [Russia's invasion and takeover](#) of the Crimean peninsula last year. President Obama has [stated](#) that last year the [CIA underestimated](#) the capabilities of the terrorists behind the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Last month, the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a much redacted but nonetheless [shocking report](#) on the CIA's largely [useless](#) post-9/11 torture program. Efforts by the agency to prevent its publication and preclude Congressional oversight of its activities included the [illegal hacking](#) of Senate Intelligence Committee computers. Naturally, CIA director John Brennan initially lied about that. Sadly, the new chairman of the Intelligence Committee Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) apparently [believes](#) that CIA torture was effective. The agency engaged in blatant lawlessness

even earlier when it destroyed - despite a [federal court order](#) not to do so - hours of video [depicting the torture](#) of two Al Qaeda suspects in 2005.

Finally, *Foreign Policy* provides a list of [seven governments that the CIA managed to overthrow](#). It is true that all of those regimes were undermined by the CIA in the context of the long dark struggle with Soviet communism, but it would be hard to claim that those efforts gained the U.S. much good will.

Certainly defenders of the CIA would reply to this long, but partial, list of monumental failures that I have overlooked many successes. Go [here](#) for the CIA's own version of its successes and weigh for yourself how they balance out against its many failures.

### **Preventing "turnkey totalitarianism."**

In a 2012 *Wired* magazine article, former NSA cryptographer William Binney warned, "[We are, like, that far from a turnkey totalitarian state](#)." His chief concern is the massive increase in the capabilities of the NSA to watch and monitor the activities of Americans.

So let us turn now to the sorry record of the National Security Agency. First, who can ever forget the [bald-faced lie](#) of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper to Congress about the extent of NSA spying on the communications of millions of Americans?

The veil over the activities of this most secretive of spy bureaucracies was partly lifted by the revelations of whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013. No doubt about it, the ability to intercept and decode the messages sent by adversaries can provide valuable insights into their intentions and their tactics. The problem is that the agency has turned its vast surveillance capabilities toward spying on the private communications of millions of Americans. This is an egregious violation of [Fourth Amendment](#) rights of Americans to be "secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures," unless a court issues a warrant based upon probable cause specifying the particular places, people, and items to be searched.

Instead, as Internet security expert [Bruce Schneier told](#) a Cato Institute conference last year, ""The NSA has turned the Internet into a giant surveillance platform." In response to Snowden's revelations, NSA director Keith Alexander [essentially lied](#) to Congress when he claimed that the NSA's spying had contributed to thwarting 54 terrorist plots. In January, 2014, the New America Foundation think-tank issued a report that concluded that NSA domestic spying had had "[no discernible impact on preventing acts of terrorism](#)." It certainly had no discernible impact on thwarting the [Boston Marathon bombings](#) in 2013 or the would-be Christmas jetliner bomber in 2009.

Also in January, President Obama's own [Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board](#) (PCLOB) issued a report on the NSA's domestic spying program that damningly found, "We have not identified a single instance involving a threat to the United States in which the telephone records program made a concrete difference in the outcome of a counterterrorism investigation." The report added, "Moreover, we are aware of no instance in which the program directly contributed to the discovery of a previously unknown terrorist plot or the disruption of a terrorist attack."

"Permitting the government to routinely collect the calling records of the entire nation fundamentally shifts the balance of power between the state and its citizens," the PCLOB also warned. Its report further noted that "while the danger of abuse may seem remote, given historical abuse of personal information by the government during the twentieth century, the risk is more than merely theoretical."

Similarly, in December President Obama own hand-picked Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies issued a report that found the NSA domestic spying was "[not essential to preventing attacks](#)." But more importantly, the Review Group worried if there is another significant terrorist attack that "many Americans, in the fear and heat of the moment, might support new restrictions on civil liberties and privacy." They added, "The powerful existing and potential capabilities of our intelligence and law enforcement agencies might be unleashed without adequate controls. Once unleashed, it could be difficult to roll back these sacrifices of freedom." That's exactly right, which is why the NSA needs to be abolished now.

### **Let's Try Something Different – Transparency and Liberty**

President Obama's response to the manifold failures and blatant violations of civil liberties perpetrated by the CIA and NSA has been [totally inadequate](#). The December 26, 2014 *New York Times* offered this [explanation](#): "Many presidents tend to be smitten with the instruments of the intelligence community. I think Obama was more smitten than most," said one former senior Obama administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss classified intelligence matters.

In 1970, the [Defense Science Board Task Force on Secrecy](#) led by physicist Frederick Seitz was asked to evaluate the usefulness of the policy of classifying information as secret. The report concluded that the amount of "information which is classified could profitably be decreased perhaps as much as 90 percent." Even more intriguingly, the task force speculated that "more might be gained than lost if our nation were to adopt—unilaterally, if necessary—a policy of complete openness in all areas of information."

In 1994, former CIA operative and foreign policy analyst [William Pfaff argued](#), "The useful information today is that supplied by area specialists, historians and ethnologists, and through conventional diplomatic observation and journalism. The United States government needs intelligence, not spying. There is a difference."

These insights about the value of transparency and seeking advice from independent scholars are even more apposite in the Internet era.

Given their massive records of incompetence and the inherent threat of secret government to undermine the liberty of citizens, both the CIA and the NSA should be abolished. As Moynihan urged nearly 25 years ago the State Department would be tasked with collecting political intelligence and the Defense Department would monitor foreign military enemies. It is often claimed that we live in a [dangerous world](#), but it is not at all clear that the CIA and NSA have made it a less menacing place.